

21ST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

**READ:
MATTHEW
22:34-46**

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

REFLECT:

Today's reading continues the lively debate in Matthew's Gospel between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem. It's worth noticing that the exchange we read here is taking place on Monday of Holy Week. Jesus' triumphal (and satirical?) entry into Jerusalem has just taken place. Danger and tension are building. So far Jesus has deftly avoided falling into the traps laid for him by his questioners, but he hasn't avoided confrontation; often responding by issuing challenges of his own.

It's worth noticing, too, that the answers Jesus gives locate him squarely within his Jewish faith. He responds with scripture. His answers, though perhaps barbed, and exasperating to his interrogators, are orthodox. Christian readers might sometimes need reminding that the command to "love thy neighbour" didn't originate

with Jesus: here he is quoting Leviticus 19:18, "you shall love your neighbour as yourself." Even Jesus' stretching of the definition of "neighbour" to encompass the enemy and the stranger has its roots in Hebrew Law: "you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34).

Neighbour-love is something we could perhaps do with an injection of just now. In this week's Zoom Bible study session on Job, we discussed some learning from Trauma Studies that relates both to Job's predicament and our own collective-trauma situation in response to the pandemic. We observed that the "heroic phase" of immediate response, where people are energised to pull together and support one another (remember Capt. Tom? Rainbows in windows? Clapping for carers?) has ebbed away and we are now in the "disillusionment phase" where we are weary of this pandemic, and hope and goodwill are running low. Many of us are feeling downcast at the thought of the long winter ahead.

There are two insights from our passage today that may help us. The first is to notice the way love of neighbour is linked with love of self. Those working in caring professions sometimes find out the hard way that care for others without self-care is unsustainable, even dangerous. Quaker writer Parker Palmer, in his wonderful little book *Let your life Speak: Listening for the voice of vocation*, says this: "...self-care is never a selfish act - it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch."

The second insight is that for Jesus love of self and neighbour is inextricably linked with, rooted in and resourced by love of God. Richard Rohr reports a lovely snippet of conversation with Desmond Tutu, where the archbishop says: "We are only the light bulbs, Richard, and our job is just to remain screwed in!" Light bulbs give light when they're connected to a power source. We are resourced to love by staying 'plugged in' to the source of all love.

CONNECT:

- How, this week, might you "listen to true self and give it the care it requires"? Try to 'check in' with your body and take inventory. How are you doing? Are you sleeping OK? Eating well? How might you show yourself some love? For me that might be a long hot bath and a large glass of gin! Or a quiet walk in the woods. What does self-care look like for you?
- How, this week, might you "love the Lord your God" with your whole being? Make time to worship, and 'plug in' to the source of all love.

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:

www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.